

Find the Best Route from A to B, with Traffic Details and Ground-level Views

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Plan and print driving routes from the comfort of home
- ✓ Accurately estimate how long a journey should take
- ✓ See a driver's-eye view of tricky junctions

Thanks to the Internet, we can forget the days of pulling into lay-bys to pore over road maps and argue about what we should have done at the last roundabout. Instead, just turn to Google's online route planning. In a few easy minutes, you can find the best route to your destination and check how long it will take to get there, see live traffic information, examine junctions in close-up detail, and print out turn-by-turn directions. Read on to discover how it's all done.



- The Benefits of Using Online Maps G 525/2
- Plan Your Route Quickly with Google Maps G 525/3
- See Turns and Junctions in Close-up Detail G 525/7
- Add Detours and Make Changes to Your Route G 525/11
- Print Turn-by-Turn Directions on Paper G 525/13

The Benefits of Using Online Maps

The old method of route planning

If you want to plan a long car journey using paper maps and road atlases, you need the latest maps in order to do it reliably. Even then, those ordinary maps still leave you to puzzle out the best route yourself, and they can't tell you the total distance or how long it will take you to get there.

Online maps are a great improvement

Online journey planners make the task much easier, combining all the best features of paper maps with those of an expensive satellite-navigation device:

- **Clear overview:** you get the entire route presented as it would be on a paper map, along with the added information that a satnav provides.
- **Up-to-date maps:** online route planners are kept updated with new roads and altered junctions.
- **Turn-by-turn directions:** an online journey planner tells you exactly where and when to make each turn, giving you step-by-step directions for the whole route.
- **Examine junctions close-up:** using the 'zoom' and 'preview' features, you can look at a tricky junction in detail to see the exact road layout, or even use a photographic satellite or street-level view to get the lay of the land before you set off.
- **Useful extra information:** the online planner will tell you the total distance to your destination and your expected journey time, as well as the distances between each turn.
- **Traffic information:** you can see where there are roadworks, road closures or traffic jams that might slow you down along the way.

Always up-to-date

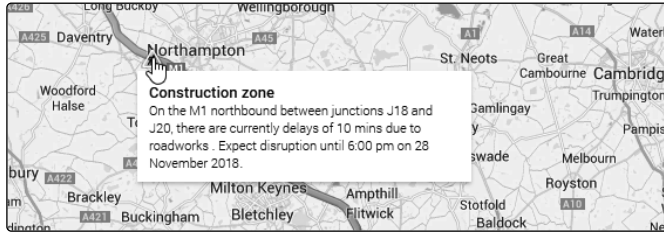
Clear directions

Zoom in for detail

Total distance and journey time

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

G 525/3



- **Save money:** online route planners can be used for free, so they could save you a fortune on maps and road atlases.

The benefits of using online journey planners are obvious, and there are plenty to choose from. It's really just a question of which are worth recommending.

The RAC's route planner (www.rac.co.uk/route-planner) is helpful for its display of live traffic incidents and delays, although it devotes large areas of the page to trying to sell you RAC membership. The AA's offering (www.theaa.com/route-planner) avoids such distractions and provides clear turn-by-turn directions. A yellow **Traffic** button on the map allows you to switch on 'Traffic alerts'.

Useful though these are, it's notable that both use maps from Google for their route planning, and there's a lot to be said for going straight to the horse's mouth. Using Google Maps directly, you have the useful extra feature of choosing between alternative routes, and you can quickly zoom in on particular junctions with a quick click or see live traffic speeds and incidents.

Two good online map services



Extra features by using Google Maps directly

Plan Your Route Quickly with Google Maps

When you want to plan a journey using Google Maps, just start your favourite web browser and follow these steps:

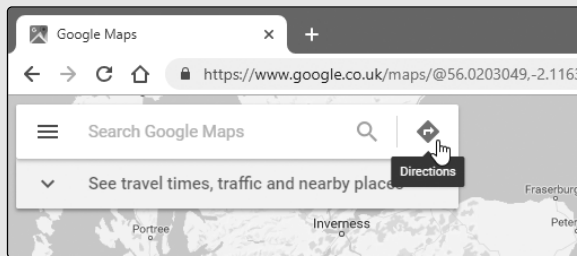
Start planning your journey

G 525/4

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

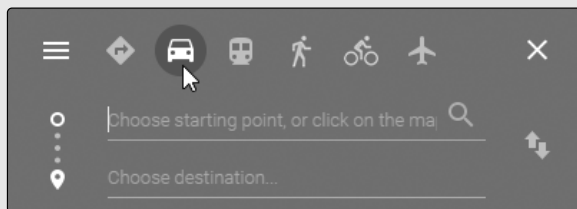


1. Type the address www.google.co.uk/maps into your browser's address box and press **(Enter)**. You'll arrive at a full-page map showing the United Kingdom with a wide search box in the top-left corner.
2. To the right of the search box, click the blue-and-white **Directions** button.



Tell Google
you're travelling
by car

3. Next, click the **Driving** icon to tell Google Maps you intend to travel by car. (Other options include public transport, walking or cycling.)

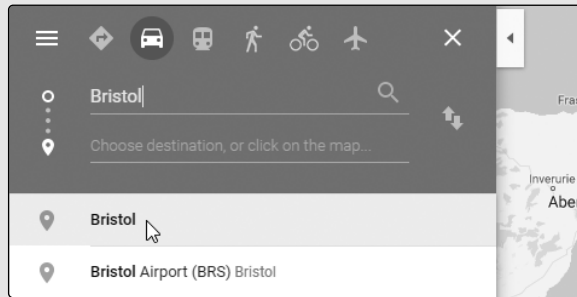


Where are you
starting from?

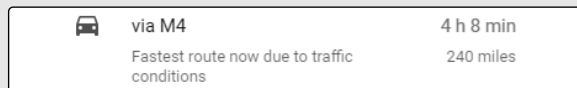
4. In the first of the two text boxes, which has a circle beside it, type the starting point of your journey: the name of a town or city, a street address or a postcode. As you do, you'll see suggested places appear in a list: click the place that best matches your starting point.

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

G 525/5



5. In the second text box which has a pin beside it, type your destination, again here choosing the best match from Google's suggestions.
6. As soon as you've chosen the destination, Google Maps does some calculations and after a few seconds you'll see brief details of your suggested route below the two text boxes. In this example, I want to travel from Bristol to Norwich, and Google has suggested a route that uses the M4 motorway, a distance of 240 miles taking 4 hours 8 minutes if the current traffic situation is taken into account.



7. On the map itself, Google highlights the proposed route with a bright blue line. A circle marks your starting point and a red flag pinpoints the destination. A little white box beside the route again tells you the distance and expected journey time. If there are alternative routes available, Google shows those on the map using grey lines (and, if there's space, puts little white boxes beside those to tell you their distances and journey times too).

Where do you want to go?

The best route is calculated for you

The proposed route is highlighted in blue

G 525/6

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

Alternative routes are shown in grey

In my example, pictured below, Google shows that I could also get from Bristol to Norwich via the A46 or the A11, but both would take longer. If you'd prefer to use one of the alternative routes, just click somewhere on the grey line and it will turn blue to indicate that it's the route that will be used to give you directions.



The alternative routes are also shown at the bottom of the details panel you were using earlier, and if you'd prefer to use one of those routes, you can click it there rather than on the map.

	via M4	4 h 8 min
	Fastest route now due to traffic conditions	240 miles
	DETAILS	
	via A11	4 h 24 min
		215 miles
	via A46	4 h 38 min
		241 miles

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

G 525/7

See Turns and Junctions in Close-up Detail

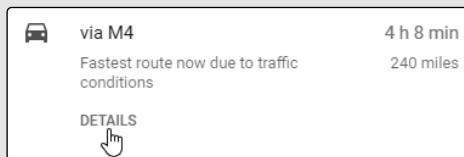
Google Maps offers a variety of different ways to show you more detailed information about your chosen route:

Preview the route one step at a time

One way to get a more detailed view of your route is to use the turn-by-turn preview feature. Here's an over-view of how it works:

A close-up view of each junction

1. In the left-hand panel, click the word **DETAILS** below your preferred route.



2. You'll see the stages of your journey listed, each with a chevron to its left. To view the details of a particular stage, click its chevron.

Click the chevron beside a stage of the trip

3. Now you'll see turn-by-turn steps through this stage of the trip and a note of the distance between each step. If you click one of these steps, as shown below, you'll see a driver's-eye photo of the step and, at the same time, the main map zooms into that area.



Click a step to see a photo and map

4. You can click the same step again to hide its photo and, in the same way, continue clicking through the steps to see their photos and map-sections.

G 525/8

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

Back to the
full-size map

5. To close this 'Details' view of your route and go back to where you were, click the left-pointing arrow at the top-left of the panel.

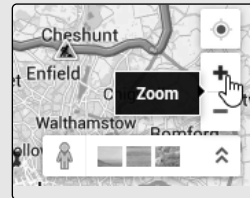
Quickly zoom
in and out

Zoom in on different parts of the route

If you're not keen on the preview feature, or you simply want a closer look at one particular section of the route, you can use the zoom feature instead:



1. In the bottom-right corner of the window, click the plus button to zoom in on the map (giving you a larger and more-detailed view). You can click the plus button repeatedly until you're seeing the level of detail you want. To zoom out again, click the minus button.



If you're using a mouse with a wheel on top, you can roll the wheel to zoom in and out. Rolling the wheel away from you zooms in; rolling it towards you zooms back out again.

Drag the map to
move around it

2. When you zoom in, it's the centre of the map that enlarges, so you might find that the particular part of the route you want to see is moved off-screen. If so, use the left mouse button to click-and-drag a point on the map to bring it back into view. (Just be careful not to click anywhere on your blue highlighted route when you do this!)

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

G 525/9

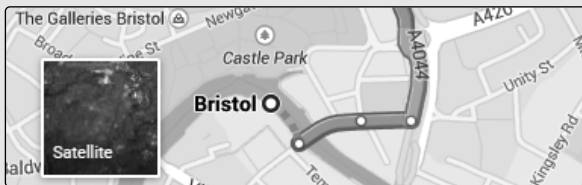
See your route from above in satellite view

If you'd prefer a more lifelike view of your route – or part of it – you can switch to satellite view and see it as a series of aerial photographs:

An aerial
photographic
view



1. Click the little **Satellite** square in the bottom-left corner of the map to switch to satellite view. As it did in the map view, Google Maps continues to highlight your route with a light-blue line, making it easy to follow.



2. Click the usual zoom buttons in the bottom-right corner of the window to zoom in and out, combined with dragging the map to move it around. You can zoom right down to the point at which you can see individual buildings and even road markings – useful if you want to get the lay of the land at your destination and perhaps see if there's a chance of finding on-street parking nearby.
3. When you've finished using satellite view, click the **Map** square in the bottom-left corner of the window to return to the street map view.

You can zoom
in almost to
ground level

Back to the
main map view

At the bottom-right corner of the window you'll see a little orange figure of a person. This takes you to Google's 'Street View' feature, letting you explore your



G 525/10

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

route from ground level. Just click that little orange figure and then click a point along your marked route and you'll zoom down to a driver's-eye view of that section of road. (It's a good idea to find the section of the route you're interested in first, using the usual map view and zooming in as necessary, and then switching to this 'Street View' feature.)

You can drag the map to the left or right to look around you, or click the road ahead to move forwards along it. This is a great way to get an advance look at any tricky junctions or to see exactly what your destination looks like so that you'll recognise it when you arrive.



When you've finished using Street View, click the white x in the top-right corner of the picture to return to the familiar map view.

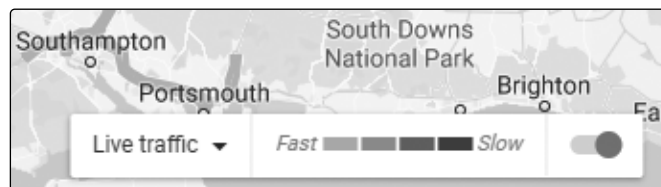
Display the current traffic situation

Identify potential trouble-spots

Google Maps can also point out any traffic holdups along your route. This information is most useful if you're just about to jump in the car and leave, but even if you're planning well in advance it can help to warn you of potential trouble-spots.

Display traffic information on the map

To display traffic information, start by clicking the word DETAILS below your chosen route. At the bottom of the map you'll see the little 'Live traffic' panel pictured below. Click the On/Off switch at the right of this panel to switch it on.



Google Maps: Route Planning Online

G 525/11

Google Maps will superimpose little red and orange lines over the roads used along your route (and roads near to your route) wherever the traffic isn't moving as freely as you'd hope. A red line indicates stationary traffic; an orange line indicates slow-moving traffic. In the screenshot below, where Google has highlighted my route along the M4 in blue, I can see two short stretches marked in orange where traffic is moving slowly.

Red and orange lines are added



Add Detours and Make Changes to Your Route

Google Maps always tries to find you the quickest route from A to B, but perhaps that isn't what you want. Maybe you'd like to take a more scenic route, or you want to make a detour to somewhere else along the way, or perhaps you'd prefer a route that doesn't involve motorways. No problem – there are various ways to customise your journey.

Small icons indicate roadworks and road closures

Add another stop along the way

If you'd like to make a detour along the way and stop somewhere else, you can tell Google Maps to adjust its route to include that destination. Near the top of the left-hand panel, click the + sign **(1)** below your current start and end points.

A detour along the route

G 525/12

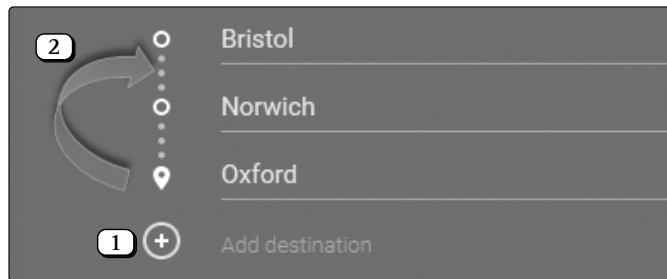
Google Maps: Route Planning Online

Type the new location

A text box will appear with a little flag to its left: type the new destination (and select the correct place from the list of suggestions that appears), and Google will add that stop to the route.

Adjust the order if necessary

Initially, the new location becomes your final destination. To adjust the order in which you arrive at these locations, simply drag the pin beside this location upwards (2) to arrange the locations into the order you want to visit them, and the route will be readjusted accordingly.

**Remove a location from the list**

If you want to remove a location you've added, move the mouse over it on the details panel and click the grey x that appears to its right.

Adjust the suggested route using the mouse

You can also alter the suggested route directly on the map by using the mouse. Start by zooming in as necessary so that you can see the required level of detail – for instance, so that you can see a junction at which you want to go in a different direction from that suggested by Google.

Drag your current route to change it

Next, move your mouse pointer on to the blue route, and a little white circle will appear. Click at the point where you want to change the route and drag the white circle somewhere else, such as to a different road you want to use,

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

G 525/13

or a different town you want to pass through. (If you make mistake, just drag the white circle back to the point at which you departed from the original route and try again.)

Avoid motorways, toll road and ferries

On the details panel, click the word **OPTIONS** and the panel will expand again to show some extra options. On the left, under **Avoid**, you can tick the boxes beside **Highways**, **Tolls** or **Ferries** (in any combination) to avoid particular types of route. As you do this, Google Maps recalculates your route and shows the new distance and expected travel time.

Avoid
motorways
and more







Print Turn-by-Turn Directions on Paper

Once you've planned the journey to your liking, you can print it out on paper to take with you. Just follow these steps to do this:

1. In the left-hand panel, click the **DETAILS** link below your chosen route.



	via M4 Fastest route, the usual traffic	4 h 8 min 240 miles
	DETAILS 	
	via A11	4 h 26 min 215 miles
	via M4 and A12	4 h 31 min 249 miles

2. This takes you to the turn-by-turn details of your route, explained on page 7.

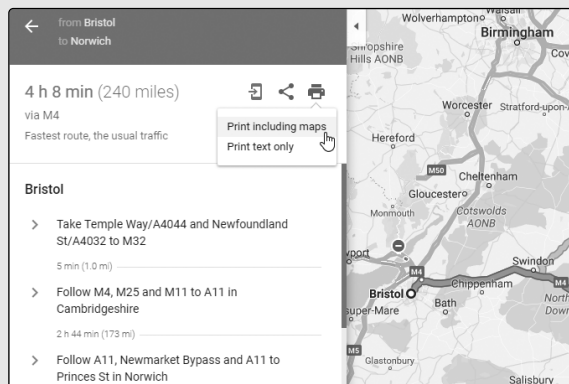
G 525/14

Google Maps: Route Planning Online

Choose what
to print

Click the printer
icon and choose
what to print

3. Near the top of this panel you'll see a printer icon. Click this icon and you'll see a choice of two printing options:
 - **Print including maps:** this prints out all the steps of your route, neatly numbered, with a map of the whole route at the top of the first page. You can type any notes you like at the top and then click the **Print** button to the right.
 - **Print text only:** this prints out all the numbered steps of your route but without the map. Again you can type your own notes before clicking the **Print** button.



4. When you click **Print**, your web browser's Print dialog will appear. Check the printing settings (for example, to ensure you're printing in colour if you chose the option to print maps), and then click the **Print** or OK button to begin printing.
5. To go back to the main map view in Google Maps, click the **Cancel** button at the top-right of the page.